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DEPARTMENT PASS TO USAID AND OFDA

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SUBJECT: NORTHERN UGANDA NOTES (February 27-March 9, 2007)

¶1. Summary: Post presents the fifteenth edition of Northern Uganda Notes to provide information on the situation on the ground and activities aimed at meeting Mission's objectives in northern Uganda. These objectives include promoting regional stability through peace and security, good governance, access to social services, economic growth, and humanitarian assistance. Post appreciates feedback from consumers on the utility of this product and any gaps in information that need to be filled. End Summary.

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PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PROCESSES  
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¶2. There were various efforts to get the peace talks restarted at Juba. The Acholi Conference, held in Juba from March 2-4, brought together religious, political and business leaders; elders; women; youth; and professionals from the wider Acholi community to discuss ways in which to put the peace process back on track. The LRA did not attend the meeting which attracted some 150 participants. The meeting was organized by Acholi cultural leader Rwot Acana and funded by DANIDA and the Canadian Government. On February 27, President Museveni stated that the Ugandan military would not pursue the LRA if they did not try to re-enter Uganda. During a session on February 28, Parliament urged the Government and LRA rebels not to resume hostilities, but to restart the peace talks and reach a peaceful settlement quickly.

¶3. UN Special Envoy Joaquim Chissano briefed the diplomatic corps on March 2 about his travel in the region and meeting with LRA leaders Joseph Kony and Vincent Otti. The meeting took place near Bunia in Congo. Kony reportedly told Chissano that he was no longer interested in war and stated that the LRA would remain committed to the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. Kony said he would count on Chissano to address the issues that forced the LRA to quit the talks. Chissano also met with Sudanese President Omar Bashir, who clarified his statements on the LRA's presence in Sudan. According to Bashir, the LRA was welcome to attend negotiations but otherwise its presence in Sudanese territory would not be tolerated.

¶4. Chissano led a delegation to meet with Kony and Otti at Ri-Kwangba starting on March 10. Uganda's lead negotiator, Minister of Internal Affairs Rugunda, and Minister of State Henry Okello Oryem, Gulu District Chairman Norbert Mao and Gulu Resident District Commissioner Walter Ochora, and at least five Acholi religious, traditional, and elected leaders will participate in the meetings. The delegation spent one day with the LRA leadership to find a way to get the talks restarted. The LRA's complaints were largely technical and administrative demands regarding the mediation team, per diems, and personal security. Another meeting was planned between Kony, the GOU, and the GOSS in two weeks to determine the date for the resumption of the talks. (Septel)

¶5. Local district officials tell us that Kony and Otti remain in Garamba National Park and have not traveled to Central African Republic.

¶6. USG Activities: Olamide Abedalja, MONUC's new representative in Uganda, paid a courtesy call on Ambassador Browning on March 6. According to Abedalja, MONUC would not be engaging in operations against the LRA.

¶7. Government mediator Ruhakana Ruganda expressed his appreciation for the U.S. Congressional resolution on northern Uganda.

¶8. On March 5, the Governments of South Sudan and Uganda signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding their support for "Conservation Landscapes for Peace" to be created along the shared border. Trans-boundary natural resource management, peace parks, and peace landscapes are conservation tools that can help maintain peace and alleviate tension over shared resources. This is particularly important as IDPs and refugees return home. USAID's Office of Transitional Initiatives funded the technical meetings in Juba and Kampala.

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SECURITY UPDATE  
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¶9. Kitgum security officials reaffirmed their commitment to protect the public and noted that there was a marked improvement in security in the district since the beginning of the year. Officials remain concerned about the presence of a small group of LRA in Labone, South Sudan, about 20 kilometers from the border with Uganda.

¶10. The judiciary's program to eliminate backlogged court cases and

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decongest prisons in northern Uganda will begin another round of court sessions in five cities. Although it was supposed to begin on March 5, the launch, was postponed until Uganda's courts resumed business, which was suspended over the invasion of the High Court premises by government security forces to re-arrest individuals who had been granted bail.

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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY  
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¶11. USG Activities: USAID's Office of Food for Peace made a \$10 million food aid contribution to World Food Program/Uganda. To date in FY07, FFP has contributed USD 27.4 million for food aid to WFP, targeting the IDPs, refugees, and those affected by drought in Karamoja.

¶12. From March 2-5, the Mission hosted a six-person USG delegation led by David McCormick, Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economic Affairs and Dina Powell, Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs. The delegation traveled to both Gulu and Kitgum in northern Uganda to see the impact of U.S.-funded humanitarian and development assistance projects, as well as meet Ugandan alumni of USG exchange programs. During their visit to the North, McCormick and Powell observed a World Food Program food distribution at Ongaku IDP camp, and toured Gulu's Lacor hospital to look at the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and Presidential Malarial Initiative programs.

¶13. The delegation also met with night commuters at a USAID funded shelter and former LRA combatants at a World Vision rehabilitation center. (The number of clients at both facilities is markedly lower than during the heights of the LRA insurgency.) The delegation also met with representatives of numerous non-governmental organizations working in northern Uganda, including the Invisible Children organization. In Kitgum, the delegation visited the USAID-Dunavant public-private partnership project which is supporting cotton cultivation, processing and marketing in northern Uganda. In Kitgum district, some 2,900 families have organized themselves into cotton "producer organizations."

¶14. On March 6, Ambassador Browning and Deputy USAID Director Elzadia Washington briefed Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials on the new USAID/OFDA office in Gulu. Ambassador James Mugume, the Acting Permanent Secretary, expressed the Government's appreciation for the establishment of a U.S. presence to work on development activities in northern Uganda.

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FROM THE MEDIA AND THE WEB  
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¶15. International Crisis Group's John Prendergast and actor Ryan Gosling published an opinion piece "At War in the Fields of the Lord: The Best Chance for Peace in Uganda" which was posted on the ABC News Online website. In the op-ed, Prendergast and Gosling state that, "although the U.S. government hasn't paid much attention to this conflict, ordinary Americans have. When they learn what is going on, their reactions are swift and compassionate." They also suggest that neither U.S. troops nor billions in aid dollars are needed: "Dispatching a senior American diplomat - with the blessing of the White House - to work all the issues necessary to end the conflict" would be sufficient to give both sides the confidence and motivation necessary to pursue peace.  
BROWNING